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## **Discourses of gender identities and gender roles in Pakistan: Women and non-domestic work in political representations**

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.05.007>

Posted at the Zurich Open Repository and Archive, University of Zurich

ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-78605>

Journal Article

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Grünenfelder, Julia (2013). Discourses of gender identities and gender roles in Pakistan: Women and non-domestic work in political representations. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 40:68-77.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.05.007>

## Title page for the paper:

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## **Discourses of Gender Identities and Gender Roles in Pakistan: Women and Non-domestic Work in Political Representations**

### ***Abstract***

This paper aims to explore some of the manifold and changing links that official Pakistani state discourses forged between women and work from the 1940s to the late 2000s. The focus of the analysis is on discursive spaces that have been created for women engaged in non-domestic work. Starting from an interpretation of the existing academic literature, this paper argues that Pakistani women's non-domestic work has been conceptualised in three major ways: as a contribution to national development, as a danger to the nation, and as non-existent. The paper concludes that although some conceptualisations of work have been more powerful than others and, at specific historical junctures, have become part of concrete state policies, alternative conceptualisations have always existed alongside them. Disclosing the state's implication in the discursive construction of working women's identities might contribute to the destabilisation of hegemonic concepts of gendered divisions of labour in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** gender; work; political representations; Muslim women; Pakistan; development

## Introduction

Pakistan has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world (World Bank, 2011: 199). Even though more and more Pakistani women are taking up paid work (GoP, 2009a), images of a modest and decent Muslim woman as the symbol of the ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ have a considerable impact on women’s working activities (Ellick, 2010; GoP, 2009a; Grünenfelder, 2012; Khan, 2007; Mirza, 2001; SDPC, 2009; Syed, 2010a). A number of researchers have highlighted that today’s image of the ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ is heavily influenced by policies and laws that were introduced in the 1970s with the aim of confining women to within the ‘four walls of the home’ (*char diwari*) and not, for example, allowing them into office settings (Cook, 2001; Shaheed, 2010). It has however also been argued that the image of the ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ has been constituted in varying ways throughout history; some have restricted their work opportunities, while others have opened up specific non-domestic work activities (Cook, 2001; Khan, 2007: 8-9; Mirza, 2002; Papanek, 1971; Shaheed, 2010; Syed, 2010a; Weiss, 1984).

This paper thus aims to explore some of the manifold and changing links that have been constructed between women and work in Pakistan. As will become clear in the following sections and as has been argued elsewhere, identities<sup>1</sup> in Pakistan have never been constructed solely on the basis of gender (see, for example, Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Rouse, 2004; Shaheed, 2010). Class, regional origin and religion have been other important categories.

However, gender norms are widely acknowledged to be a stabilising factor for existing systems

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, identities – as well as subjects – are conceptualised as multiply constituted, embodied, non-essentialist and relational, rather than stable and fixed (Butler, 1990; Davies, 1997; Hall, 2001; Haraway, 1988; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1985). Such a conceptualisation posits that a subject is always discursively constituted and can only exercise agency within discursive possibilities. While a discursive space allows for a certain degree of agency, it does not necessarily translate into agentive action.

of labour division (Kazi & Raza, 1991; Rouse, 2004; Weiss, 1984). Religious beliefs and values have been major sources of justification for gender norms and relations. Since the 1940s, when Pakistan was created with religion as its *raison-d'être*, Islam and Muslim-ness have been important social categories (Shaheed, 2010), with particular consequences for Pakistani women. Pakistani women – similarly to women in other contexts – were constituted as symbols of national identity, and their identities and social roles became a matter of public concern, particularly for state actors (Rouse, 2004: 6).

While there has been research into the impact of official state discourse on women's identities in general (Cook, 2001; Jamal, 2006; Kabeer, 1991; Rouse, 2004; Saigol, 2002; Shaheed, 2010), there seems to be a lack of academic literature that analyses how the state has been formally implicated in the constitution of working women's identities. Two as yet unconnected bodies of academic literature tackle the topic indirectly. First, there is literature that explicitly analyses how the state of Pakistan has constructed an ideal 'Pakistani woman', but this literature hardly discusses how non-domestic work is inflicted on these ideal 'Pakistani women'; second, there is literature that discusses how state policies have affected Pakistani women's non-domestic work activities, but this literature does not explicitly analyse in what way these policies reflect constructions of a 'Pakistani working woman'. Bringing together these two bodies of academic literature makes it possible to explore new themes around gender and work in Pakistan and to raise wider critical questions about the links between gendered divisions of labour and the political construction of gender identities than have been discussed in academia to date.

This paper therefore asks how the official Pakistani state created different discursive spaces for Pakistani ‘working women’<sup>2</sup> between the 1940s and the late 2000s. While it acknowledges that a ‘state’ is by no means an independent and monolithic entity, it uses the term ‘state discourses’ to refer to systems of representations that have become powerful – or have the potential to become powerful – within the Pakistani federal state apparatus and that (at least partially) organise the conditions for people’s agency<sup>3</sup>. Such systems of representations are produced, for example, through state leaders’ and opposition leaders’ speeches, policy documents, constitutional and legal frameworks and educational and judicial institutions, and have links from the global down to the local scale.

The paper is structured in four sections: first, it explains why state discourses provide a useful analytical entry point for studying politics of gender identities, discloses how the author accessed state discourses via existing academic literature and discusses the limitations of this approach. Second, it outlines how the author compiled a corpus of existing academic literature. Third, it illustrates the three dominant ways in which official state discourses – as represented and constructed in existing academic literature – have conceptualised women’s work and (dis)qualified ‘working women’ since the 1940s. Finally, it discusses the contributions of the findings and suggests how future research might investigate constructions of ideal ‘Pakistani women’ and the consequences of these constructions for working women.

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<sup>2</sup> In Pakistan, as in many other countries, women who are engaged in unpaid domestic work have not been labelled as ‘working women’, either in everyday language or in political discourses (Carpenter, 2001). Since I am particularly interested in women’s options for non-domestic work, I use the term ‘working women’ primarily to refer to women engaged in non-domestic work activities, i.e. in paid employment and self-employment at home or outside the home and in non-paid social work beyond the boundaries of the family business. Such a broad definition is necessary in order to identify and characterise discursive spaces over a period of more than 70 years.

<sup>3</sup> Conceptually, this paper understands ‘state discourses’ as practices that (re)produce broader discourses, such as gender and class discourses. ‘Discourse’ in a broader sense has been defined by Michel Foucault as a system of representation that, for example, includes “rules which prescribe certain ways of talking about (...) topics and exclude other ways – which govern what is ‘sayable’ or ‘thinkable’” about something at a particular historical moment (Hall, 2001: 73).

## **Methodology – Entry points for studying politics of gender identities**

Various different analytical entry points have been proposed for studying the politics of gender identities. Although scholars who build on Foucault's work have argued for a re-conceptualisation of the state, civil society and family as inseparable entities, it is still considered useful to distinguish the state analytically from other spheres so as to understand its role in regulating gender relations (Mottier, 2004; Rouse, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Winker & Degele, 2009; see also Evans, 2011). Since women often play important symbolic roles in society, state actors have promoted certain images of women to serve their own ideological purposes (Kandiyoti, 1991; Shaheed, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Although states are not monolithic entities, they are locations of power that produce knowledge through institutions such as the political executive, the legislature, the judiciary, and public administration (Jessop, 2009). Thus, while some researchers have tended to focus on women's narratives and the question of how women negotiate the role of 'woman' in their everyday lives (Besio, 2006; Chaudhry, 2009; Hussain, 2010; Jamal, 2009; Naher, 2010; Saigol, 2002; Khan, 1998 for research on Muslim women), others have concentrated instead on state discourses and how states deploy specific images of women to legitimate their policies (Kandiyoti, 1991; Mernissi, 1987; Moghadam, 1992; Rao, 1999; Yuval-Davis, 1997). In the context of Pakistan, researchers using the latter analytical strategy have analysed artefacts such as politicians' speeches, historical records of political debates (Ansari, 2009; Syed, 2006), curricula and social studies textbooks (Naseem, 2004; Saigol, 2005) and legal texts and institutions (Imran, 2005; Jamal, 2006; Toor, 2007) to understand how gender identities have been normalised.

I have taken the existing academic literature and its constructions of state discourses as my methodological entry point to study the intersections between politics of gender identities and gendered divisions of work. To provide a historical overview I had to select a manageable amount of data. I therefore only considered data (primary data and interpretations) from academic literature published in English. English is widely used by Pakistani academics, and publications in English are relatively easily accessible compared with publications in other languages. This restriction is not without its limitations; my study is dependent on information available in this specific form. Furthermore, the chosen procedure entails a dependency on other authors' selection of primary data and also – to a certain extent – on their contextualisation and interpretation of primary data. This is particularly critical, given that many papers do not provide any details of their data sets and sampling process.

To counter these limitations I complemented my interpretations of data from existing academic literature with additional data from non-academic sources such as government documents and recent newspaper articles in English available online. This additional material illustrates the different conceptualisations of women's work and how they continue to inform debate to this day. The following section describes the sampling strategy and the characteristics of the source literature for this paper.

### ***The corpus of academic literature about the Pakistani state, gender and work***

I searched the academic literature in English using BASE, Scirus, Google scholar and Google search engines, using the terms 'Pakistan and women/woman' and 'Pakistan and gender', both separately and in combination with the keywords 'labour', 'work', 'employment' and 'politics'.



In addition to these literature searches by keyword, I also screened the reference sections of the collected texts for related work. If any of the references turned up data related to the research question, I integrated this into the corpus as well. Literature that contained relevant information for my research was arranged as a corpus and grouped into five categories that reflected the main content of the texts: ‘state policies and consequences for women’ (26 works<sup>4</sup>), ‘discursive constructions of women through the state’ (11 works), ‘women’s movement’ (11 works), ‘labour politics’ (4 works) and ‘colonial state and gender’ (4 works). Since I was interested in how state discourses articulate the possibilities for ‘working women’, I considered neither literature analysing labour statistics nor literature about working women’s personal narratives with no explicit reference to state discourses.

Through these searches I compiled a corpus of a total of 56 works: 46 journal articles, books and book sections, eight research reports, one special edition of a magazine (*Viewpoints* Special Edition, 2009) and one PhD thesis (Naseem, 2004). The literature was published between 1971 and 2010 and concentrated on the nationalist movement (1940s) and General Zia-ul-Haq’s regime (1977-88). The literature discusses gender and state discourses in Pakistan from various theoretical angles. With respect to content, the literature on the one hand explicitly analyses how the state of Pakistan has constructed an ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ (mostly literature categorised as ‘discursive constructions of women through the state’ and ‘colonial state and gender’ – especially Cook, 2001; Jamal, 2006; Naseem, 2004; Rouse, 2004; Shaheed, 2010); yet these studies hardly discuss how non-domestic work is inflicted on these ideal ‘Pakistani women’. The literature on the other hand also discusses how state policies have affected – among other things – Pakistani women’s non-domestic work activities (mainly literature categorised as ‘state

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<sup>4</sup> Each piece of work was assigned to a single category.

policies and consequences for women'; Imran, 2005; Korson & Maskiell, 1985; Shafqat, 1996; Shaheed & Warraich, 1998; Weiss, 1994). Yet these discussions do not explicitly analyse how such policies reflect constructions of a 'Pakistani working woman' and how she relates to the ideal 'Pakistani woman'.

### **'Pakistani women' and non-domestic work in state discourses**

The interpretation of data found in the academic literature I have compiled suggests that there have been three major ways in which state discourses have conceptualised women and non-domestic work. I will present these three ways in the following sub-sections and illustrate them with a number of (non-exhaustive) examples. Although some conceptualisations have been more dominant than others at specific historical junctures, the conceptualisations presented have co-existed throughout history. Since this paper's goal is to show continuities over time, the findings are presented in thematic rather than chronological order<sup>5</sup>. The three examples are by no means meant to cover all possible linkages, yet according to the literature they have been the most influential in shaping Pakistani women's identities and, as a consequence, their work activities, as will be argued below.

#### ***Women's work as a contribution to national development***

Based on my interpretation of the data that is represented in academic literature, I argue that state discourses have, at several historical junctures, predominantly constructed Pakistani women's work as a contribution to national development and thereby established legitimacy for (primarily

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<sup>5</sup> Readers interested in Pakistan's complex political history yet unfamiliar with it may consult one of the interactive timelines that provide a concise overview, e.g. [www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/01/20121181235768904.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2012/01/20121181235768904.html) or [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12966786](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12966786).

privileged) Pakistani 'working women'. I provide evidence for this argument by discussing the role that has been attributed to women's work at different times in Pakistan's history. I distinguish between women's work in the political, social and economic spheres.

According to Nancy Cook (2001: 36ff), Muslim politicians, through their speeches during the Pakistan independence movement of the 1940s, have created a discursive space that has opened up the possibility for women to engage in politics. She and other authors (Jalal, 1991; Rouse, 2004) argue that it was above all Muhammad Ali Jinnah who actively drew on women for the cause of independence. In his speeches, he advocated women's participation in public life and took his sister Fatima Jinnah along to rallies. In 1942, responding to a leading Muslim woman's enquiry about the position the new state would allow its women citizens, Jinnah said:

Tell your young girls, I am a progressive Muslim leader. I, therefore, take my sister along with me to backward areas like Balochistan and NWFP and she also attends the sessions of the All India Muslim League and other public meetings. Pakistan will be a progressive country in the building of which women will be seen working shoulder to shoulder with men in every department of life (cited in Saeed, 2007).

Jinnah supported a resolution for greater participation by women in Muslim League politics that was put to the League's 1938 annual session (Ansari, 2009: 1434; Willmer, 1996: 580). This resolution was the basis for the formation of a central sub-committee for women and of subsequent provincial and district sub-committees through which women could become

increasingly politically active (Hasan, 1981; Willmer, 1996). According to the reviewed literature, privileged women such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah's sister Fatima Jinnah used the space that was discursively created to participate in the anti-colonial and nationalist struggle as political activists (Ansari, 2009: 1434; Haq, 1996: 160ff; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Rouse, 2004: 19; Syed, 2006: 108; Willmer, 1996). For example, such women took part in pro-League demonstrations for independence in Lahore during the winter of 1946-47 (Mumtaz & Khan, 1987: 45ff; Willmer, 1996). However, legal provisions for women's political representation remained minimal: the 1956 Constitution reserved only 10 seats (out of 300) for women in the National Assembly, and for a period of only 10 years (Mumtaz, 1998: 364). Women's traditional activities as wives and mothers were still represented as their main contribution to the nationalist struggle. As wives, women were expected to influence their husbands and male relatives; and as mothers, they were asked to socialise youth into Islamic culture (Cook, 2001; Hasan, 1981; Willmer, 1996). This suggests that the discursive space for women's political engagement remained limited throughout the 1950s.

The discursive space for women's political activities at federal level widened in the 1970s and by the mid-1970s the major political parties had established women's wings (Mumtaz, 1998: 322). Even during General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's rule (1977-88) – usually referred to as the most detrimental for women – women were included in the newly constituted Federal Advisory Council (Majlis-e-Shoora), and the number of reserved seats for women in the National Assembly was increased from 10 to 20 by a 1985 Presidential Order (Mumtaz, 1998: 365).

Benazir Bhutto's election as Prime Minister of Pakistan in the late 1980s provides grounds for the assumption that there have been times when state discourses have viewed women's political work as a contribution to national development. From the 1960s onwards, women's engagement in political activities was a matter of intense debate, revolving around the question of whether women were able and eligible to lead a Muslim state. A discursive space had already begun to open up during the 1965 elections, when Fatima Jinnah was elected as official candidate to run against Ayub Khan. At that time – as in the late 1980s – there was controversy over whether a woman could be the head of a Muslim state (Haq, 1996: 165; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1989: 60; Rouse, 2004: 27; Shaheed, 2010: 853). In Fatima Jinnah's case, her candidacy was declared un-Islamic through a *fatwa* (a religious pronouncement, often translated as edict), but with Benazir Bhutto, a *fatwa* was issued stating that “as the prime minister is not the emir or the head of the state (i.e. president), who must be a man, but is rather the head of a political party, there were no gender restrictions on who could hold the office of prime minister” (Weiss, 1994: 439). At that historical juncture, the discourse that created this specific relationship between women and political work became so dominant that it was possible for Benazir Bhutto to be elected Prime Minister – the first ever female Prime Minister of a Muslim state.

State discourses have apparently created another legitimate ‘working woman’ by representing women's unpaid social work in the public sphere as a contribution to national development. Several authors note that when Independence was gained and the State of Pakistan was formed, women's political activities were redirected towards public, yet unpaid relief and charity work in order to take care of the many refugees arriving in Pakistan (Ansari, 2009; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Rouse, 2004). Yet the literature suggests that, even though women in relief work were

represented as contributors to national development, the discursive space for women and their work opportunities remained narrow. Shaheed and Warraich report that “[e]arly on, the [political] establishment started distinguishing between those [non-political women’s groups] undertaking activities seen as non-threatening cum nation-building and those considered too radical for the time” (1998: 274). According to them, only women’s groups engaged in non-controversial social welfare activities received full government support (Shaheed & Warraich, 1998: 274). Other authors add that the activities of the legitimate woman social worker were portrayed as the natural extension of a woman’s domestic role, and in this way the woman social worker fitted the conceptualisation of the ideal Pakistani woman as a caring wife and mother (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 52; Rouse, 2004: 29)<sup>6</sup>. However, the resultant discursive space made it possible for women to live out alternative identities besides those of mothers and wives. Taking a role in political work during the independence movement and in relief work during the post-Partition period enabled these groups of women to gain experience of public life (Rouse, 2004: 19).

In the economic sphere, women were endowed with an instrumental value as a means of expanding the labour force and enhancing economic development, despite the fact that much of women’s economic contributions did not feature in state discourses until the 2000s (Haq, 1996: 160ff; see also last sub-section). In the 1950s, during the process of formulating the 1956 Constitution, there were intense public debates about women’s roles in Pakistani society (Ansari, 2009; Haq, 1996). A Charter of Women’s Rights was presented to the Constituent Assembly by women activists that was intended to guarantee Pakistani women, among other things, equality

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<sup>6</sup> See also Gul Aldikacti Marshall and Anu Sabhlok (2009) for an illustration of how Turkish Islamist and Hindu nationalist women become ‘moral subjects’ through their paid or unpaid work in the public space, because they define their work as a service to community.

of status, equality of opportunity and equal pay for equal work (Ansari, 2009: 1453ff). The public debates surrounding the Constitution and the Constitution itself indicate that at that particular time it was possible to place ‘working women’ within the official framework of an Islamic Republic, or at least a marginal place (I argued above, for example, that only 10 seats were constitutionally reserved for 10 years for women’s representatives in the National Assembly; see also Ansari, 2009).

The process of integrating (working) women’s rights into legal policies continued under the military regime of Muhammad Ayub Khan during the late 1950s and the 1960s. His attempt at rapid economic modernisation included greater education for women and emphasised family planning (Haq, 1996: 165; Moghadam, 1992), explicitly drawing on discourses of modernisation. Anita Weiss argues that he tied his ideological orientation pragmatically to economic growth and viewed the promotion of female literacy as a way of creating a larger workforce during an economic boom (Weiss, 1990: 440; Weiss, 1994: 413 & 416). The ‘West Pakistan Maternity Benefit Ordinance’ was introduced in December 1958 to “consolidate the law relating to the employment of women in factories in the Province of West Pakistan [except the Tribal Areas]” (WPMBO 1958). The passing of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance in 1961 is regarded as a first attempt to provide women with some form of economic and legal protection from their husbands through the regulation of divorce and polygamy (Weiss, 1994: 416). Women’s legal status was further strengthened under the democratic regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The 1973 Constitution urged that there should be no discrimination on the basis of sex (Article 25) and, in special reference to working women, that there should be equality of opportunities for women in government employment (Article 27) (Haq, 1996: 166; Jalal, 1991: 99; Weiss, 1994: 417). By

1975, all branches of the civil service had been opened to women (Jalal, 1991; Shaheed, 1998: 444 & FN16).

Between 1977 and 1988, under the rule of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, state discourses that represented women's economic activities as contributing to national development were drowned out by more dominant discourses that constructed women's engagement in non-domestic activities (above all in employment) mainly as a danger to the nation (see next sub-section). However, there were also contradictions in state discourses during this period. A Women's Division was created in the Cabinet Secretariat in 1979 and the Sixth National Plan – a plan that was to provide a broad framework for the development of the country for the period 1983-88 – included a chapter on women's development for the first time (Korson & Maskiell, 1985; Weiss, 1985).

From the 1990s onwards, state discourses portraying women's economic engagement as a driver of national development once more started to dominate and seem to have re-established and increased the legitimacy of Pakistani 'working women'. Two government acts, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010 (GoP, 2010b) and the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 (GoP, 2010a) were a good illustration of the growing discursive space for 'working women' within state discourses in the late 2000s. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010 specified what constitutes sexual harassment of women in public, private and workplaces and further increased maximum punishment for assaults. When the bill was introduced to the National Assembly in April 2009, it contained the following legitimisation:



This amendment will not only make public and private environment safer for women but will open up the path for more women to pursue livelihood with dignity. It will reduce poverty as more and more women will get the courage to enter the job market. In addition it will open up the opportunity for private and government sector to get competent human resource and result in better production and quality services. The social benefits as a result of providing protection for women will become a major contribution to the development of this country (GoP, 2009b: 3).

With this reasoning, the policy not only recognises working women's economic contributions to national development, yet it also recognised working women as legitimate 'Pakistani women' through the joining of discourses on gender, nationhood, Islam and progress. This marked an important shift in the constitution of 'working women', since women's progress had until then been conceptualised in terms of the nation's growth, i.e. on the basis of economics and not of women's individual development (Rouse, 2004: 78).

### ***Women's work as a danger to the nation***

The reading of the literature suggests that state discourses have also represented (most) 'working women' as a danger to the nation and, in this way, constructed them as imperfect 'Pakistani women'. Before discussing the representation of 'working women', I outline how the state of Pakistan has deployed women to construct a stable national identity.

According to Valentine Moghadam (1992: 39), and Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987: 48), women in general tend to become markers of cultural and political objectives in periods of political change or contestation. As Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987: 48) describe it:

History tells us that women are called upon in times of crisis, when social norms are forgotten and women take up arms, join the Red Cross (or Crescent), man factories and communications, and participate wholeheartedly in the national struggle at hand. But history also tells us that the moment the crisis is over, and the men return home, women are once again asked to take a back seat, to return to their kitchens and children. Motherhood is praised and women are told to revert to their earlier constricted roles.

It is thus no surprise that gender became a *public* concern in the sub-continent during the independence movement of the 1940s when women were constituted as symbols of national identity (Rouse, 2004: 6). As Pakistan came into being with religion as its *raison-d'être*, the Pakistani nation was quickly defined as a *Muslim* nation (Shaheed, 2010). Nationalist rhetoric combined discourses of gender, nationhood and Islam to constitute the women of the Muslim 'nation' as a symbol of Pakistani identity (Cook, 2001). Consequently, women – as the embodiment of national honour<sup>7</sup> – were regarded as a key element of debates about what Pakistani Muslim-ness should mean and how it could be protected (Ansari, 2009; Jamal, 2006; Rouse, 2004; Toor, 2007).

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<sup>7</sup> As Rouse (2004: 77) poignantly describes it, "Honour and virtue were to reside in women (...) what we are talking about here is men's honour, not women's. It was men's honour that was to be preserved via women; women were to be the conduits of its preservation. This was to be achieved through a tightening of scriptural practices and taboos, as interpreted by different figures".

However, Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987: 48) note that “[e]vents following independence showed that while some of the leaders of the Pakistan Movement, notably Jinnah and his immediate companions, genuinely believed in the need to break the shackles of women’s bondage, there were other elements for whom the participation of women in the movement had only been a matter of expediency stemming from a temporary urgent need”. Nancy Cook (2001: 33) argues that even Jinnah – through his representation of Muslim women as ‘mothers of the nation’ in the 1940s – constructed women an ideal identity as “mothers and wives who nurture, support, socialise, and sacrifice for the good of the nation”. Zia-ul-Haq, during his rule from 1977 to 1988, similarly constituted ideal ‘Muslim women’ as biological and ideological reproducers of the nation, declaring that women’s main value is to be wives and mothers who give birth to citizens and socialise youth into Islamic culture (Cook, 2001: 32-34).

I argue that within such conceptualisations of an ideal ‘Pakistani woman’, ‘working women’ were mainly seen as liabilities to Islam and, in that way, as a danger to the Pakistani nation. Shahnaz Rouse (2004: 29) points out that there have been times in Pakistan’s early years when such different segments of society as the Left and the religious Right have used discourses of national identity and anti-imperialism to construct a good ‘Pakistani woman’ that excluded those who had achieved economic and social independence. The Left represented the latter as “frivolous women, victims of the consumerist ideology of imperialism”, while the Right charged them as “being no better than prostitutes, betraying their heritage” (Rouse, 2004: 29). However, spaces for ‘working women’ within state discourses have apparently been restricted mostly through definitions of what ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Muslim women are. Most of the definitions have

been connected to the debate about what is (un)Islamic. Jamaat-e-Islami<sup>8</sup> denied women's engagement in politics until 1963 (the year when they supported Fatima Jinnah's candidacy for the presidency as part of a coalition in opposition to Ayub Khan). The denial was based on the argument that:

Experience has shown that adult franchise for women under the prevailing conditions in Pakistan has proved unsuitable for them and harmful for the welfare of the country. In Islam, active politics and administration are not fields of activity for the womenfolk (no indication about author and date [probably by a 1960s Jamaat-e-Islami politician], cited in Haq, 1996: 166).

During the Zia-ul-Haq years (1977-88), gender and above all sexual mores became central to political discourses. The notion of a 'Pakistani woman' was "replaced by an 'Islamic woman' who dressed in a particular manner, was educated – if at all – in certain subjects and segregated institutions, and was preferably silent and invisible. In contrast to national dress for men, women's 'Islamic dress' meant compulsory *chadors* for all government school students and teachers as well as women state employees" (Shaheed, 2010: 858). Within these discourses, 'working women' have been constructed as liabilities to Islam due to their loose morality that was considered to erode national, Muslim and family values (Cook, 2001: 33).

Based on such specific definitions of a 'good' Muslim woman, several political decisions were taken that restricted 'working women's' space. One of the first consequences that specifically affected 'working women' was the closure of both the Women's National Guard and the

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<sup>8</sup> Jamaat-e-Islami is a religious political party that seeks to establish a state based on Sharia law (Nasr, 1993; <http://jamaat.org>).

Women's Naval Reserve as early as in 1954<sup>9</sup>. Religious elements persuaded the authorities that it was un-Islamic for males to train young women in self-defence and therefore dangerous for the nation (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 51-52; Shaheed, 2010: 853). By contrast, as argued earlier, the Women's Voluntary Service, which concentrated on social welfare, received government support as it fostered the image of the Pakistani woman as a caring and charitable motherly figure (see also Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 52).

From the mid-1970s onwards, the number of state policies targeting (educated) working women increased. However, they regulated the appearance of working women rather than the type of work that was considered acceptable for women (Korson & Maskiell, 1985; Weiss, 1985). In 1979, female newscasters on state-run television were ordered to cover their heads with a *dupatta* [Pakistani headscarf] (Weiss, 1985: 874; Haq, 1996: 166) and some years later a government directive called on them to stop wearing heavy make-up and experimental hairstyles (Korson & Maskiell, 1985: 609). Female Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) employees were equipped with more modest uniforms. While no rules regarding clothing were issued for male newscasters, PIA ordered – along with the new uniform for the female employees – a nationalised uniform for its male employees (Korson & Maskiell, 1985: 610)<sup>10</sup>. Women teachers and students were also directed to wear the *chador* (shawl) while teaching (Haq, 1996: 166; Korson & Maskiell, 1985: 610; Shaheed, 2010: 585). A government directive from 1982 said that

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<sup>9</sup> Both were formed in 1949 (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987:51)

<sup>10</sup> See also History of PIA (2011) for an overview of uniform designs worn by PIA flight attendants from past to present. The PIA uniforms are a matter of debate even today (see for example Daily Times, 2005 and PakTribune, 2005).

The Federal Government has decided that in all institutions under its control, girls from class IX upward will henceforth wear a proper *dupatta* as head cover, rather than the thin strip of cloth which is generally in use at present. It has further been decided that all female staff in schools and colleges will be modestly dressed and will wear a *chador* over their dress (quoted in Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 79).

Discourses that constitute ‘working women’ as a danger to the nation curtailed women’s work options at several points in history. Korson & Maskiell (1985: 609) report for instance that a 1983 government directive banned single women from foreign service posts abroad. Only later was this order extended to single men, though it has never been enforced. Women’s participation in so-called ‘spectator sports’ and mixed-gender cultural performances was restricted (Haq, 1996: 167; Korson & Maskiell, 1985: 611). For example, the women’s hockey team was not allowed to go to the 1986 Seoul Asian Games and it was debated whether sending other women athletes (only four were selected in total) was in accordance with Islam (Mumtaz, 1998: 328 & 349). Even though voices seeking to limit women’s working options began to have a renewed impact on women’s everyday lives in the 2000s (DAWN, 2006, 2008 & 2009; Jafar, 2007; Shaheed, 2009), they have not (yet) become so politically dominant that they are transformed into national laws and directives.

However, lately there have been heated discussions as to whether working women should or should not receive support from the state, as can be seen at the example of the Protection against Harassment of women at the Workplace Bill, 2010 (GoP, 2010b), which was signed into law by President Asif Ali Zardari on 9 March 2010 (see previous sub-section). In February 2010, the

press reported that male politicians and conservative groups had called the bill ‘un-Islamic’. The reporter had the following comments:

In a television talk show, he [Gul Naseeb Khan of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam] said the bill protecting women from sexual harassment would only lead to the spread of vulgarity. ‘There is no need for women to seek employment because the responsibility for their upkeep lies on the shoulder of men,’ he said.

The only two professions women can take up, he argued, are teaching and medicine -- and those are only if it is absolutely necessary. (...) During debates on the first bill on sexual harassment, all the mainstream parties rejected the amendment proposed by religious parties for women to observe an ‘Islamic dress code’ at workplaces to claim protection of their modesty (Ebrahim, 2010a).

As can be seen from this statement, the discursive space for ‘working women’, even though considerably narrowed, has never been totally closed off by discourses that construct ‘working women’ as a danger to the nation. Intersecting discourses of Muslim-ness and gender create a small, yet more or less stable space for (at least) two specific types of ‘working women’ in response to demands for a society segregated by gender; these are female medical staff and teachers. Even though these two professions are commonly perceived as those most acceptable for women, requests for a society segregated by gender have created a need for women in other professions as well. In the 1980s, when such discourses were very dominant, a presidential proposal suggested to establish a Women’s University with primarily female staff in order to advance gender segregation in educational institutions (Haq, 1996: 167; Korson & Maskiell,

1985: 611; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987: 86ff; Weiss, 1985: 874). In 1983-84, there were proposals for separate courts for women with female staff (Korson & Maskiell, 1985: 606; Weiss, 1985: 869) and in 1989, a women's bank was announced (Khan, 2007: 17; Weiss, 1990: 444). Even the Jamaat-e-Islami's Women's Wing has formed a department to deal with the issue of 'working women' (Jamaat-e-Islami Women's Wing, 2011). Thus the demand for a gender-segregated Pakistani society opened up a discursive space for 'working women'.

### ***Women's work as non-existent***

In this third part, I argue that state discourses have contributed to rendering (certain types of) Pakistani women's non-domestic work invisible at times, because state discourses have been shaped by men and women speaking from a mainly urban-based, politically and socio-economically privileged and ethnic and religious majority position.

State discourses in pre- and post-Partition Pakistan have been heavily shaped by members of the English-educated, privileged upper classes in urban Pakistan according to some authors (Mumtaz, 1998: 325; Jalal, 1991; Rahman, 1999; Rouse, 2004) and they have therefore long failed to recognise productive members of the labour force in rural areas as 'working women'.<sup>11</sup> Rural woman who work in agriculture have not caused a lot of political debate or, as Farida Shaheed put it in 1999:

The leaders of the political discourse were notably not (and still are not) interested in the conditions of women working in the fields... Their primary concern, of course was how to obtain power and retain power. And women and gender issues were relevant only

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<sup>11</sup> In 2010-11, 75% of all employed women (or 12.11 million) worked in agriculture and allied activities (GoP, 2011: 22). As a comparison, only 36% of all employed men (or 41.73 million) worked in agriculture and allied activities over the same period (GoP, 2011: 22).



insofar as the issue was how to cope with (and control) the implications of changing social and economic circumstances (Shaheed, 1999, quoted in Jafar, 2005: 43).

The invisibility of certain types of women's economic contributions becomes apparent when we consider the state's statistical practices. Rouse (2004:36ff), Kazi and Raza (1991), Maskiell (1990) and Afzal and Nasir (1987) show that in the past, women's work has been systematically underrepresented in official statistics, especially work done by rural and lower-class women in informal employment and particularly in agriculture and industry. The authors explain for example, that census-takers often failed to interview women and to register women's involvement in irregular and cyclic work, and that the participation of women in the informal economy made data collection very difficult. It was only in 1990-91 that the government redefined the concept of 'labour force' for its statistic classifications in the Labour Force Survey. The new definition identified women (of age ten years and over) as "employed if they engaged in any of the 14 agricultural and non-agricultural activities listed in the International Standard Industrial Classification" (PILER, 2007: 46). Through the 'augmented activity rate', the Labour Force Survey now also records activities in agriculture, food processing, handicrafts and others that had long been invisible. In 2010-11, men's augmented activity rates were only insignificantly higher than the standard refined rates, whereas women's augmented activity rates (37%) were significantly higher than the standard rates (22%) (GoP, 2011: 19).

Similarly, certain types of women's work have been rendered invisible by their being neglected by the law. According to a 2007 PILER report (2007: 44), all Pakistani labour laws excluded agricultural workers, informal sector workers and home-based workers at the time. These are the

three categories of workers where there are a majority of women. Even though a ‘national policy on home-based workers’ was drafted in 2009 (Ebrahim, 2010b; GoP, n.d.), it has not progressed beyond the drafting stage (Mustafa, 2011).

During the literature search I realised that while, to a certain extent, the academic literature discusses the socio-economic (or class) and urban biases of state discourses about women and work (Jafar, 2005; Jalal, 1991; PILER, 2007; Rouse, 2004; Syed, 2010b)<sup>12</sup>, it has largely remained silent about a possible religious and sectarian bias. As I explained earlier, state discourses have tended to construct the ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ as a ‘Muslim woman’ who could be judged according to definitions of what makes a good or a bad Muslim. Why does the literature barely mention state discourses about non-Muslim (working) women, even though authors suggest that Christian women for example have engaged differently with employment than Muslim women (Healey, 2010; Sales, 1999; French *et al.*, 1994; Maskiell, 1985)? Has there been no academic reflection of such discourses, or was there no state discourse? Based on the literature I have reviewed and the literature I have come across but not reviewed, it remains unclear whether state discourses have allowed Pakistani women from non-Muslim backgrounds to have different roles as workers than those from Muslim backgrounds.

The topic of gender was also largely absent from the literature on labour politics<sup>13</sup>. Candland (2007), who writes about workers’ organisations in Pakistan and their role in formal politics, argues that women workers in Pakistan are not well represented in Pakistani labour unions.

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<sup>12</sup> I was astonished that I was unable to find any references to women as agricultural workers in the literature about state leaders’ speeches. Since Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a labour leader and a supporter of workers’ cause himself (Syed, 2008), I would be especially interested to know whether he really made no mention of women agricultural workers in his speeches or whether this is simply not reflected in academic literature.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, only four works were included into the literature corpus (see ‘The Pakistani state, gender and work’).

Agricultural workers, of whom a substantial number are female, are prohibited from forming labour unions. It might therefore be possible that gender and women's issues indeed featured less often in official state discourses. However, it is also likely that gender has not been adequately reflected in academic literature about the Pakistani state and labour politics, since several women, such as Riffat Razi, Rahana Yasmeen and Kaneez Fatima, have served as high-profile leaders of several workers' unions.

## Conclusion

Discussions as to whether Pakistani working women can be considered decent and modest Muslim women raise the question of how Pakistani working women are discursively constructed and positioned in relation to an ideal 'Pakistani woman'. By bringing together and critically re-reading two existing but previously unrelated bodies of academic literature, this paper has shown that state discourses (as they have been presented in the literature) have contrasted 'working women' with an ideal 'Pakistani woman' in three dominant ways between the 1940s and the early 2010s: In certain contexts, state discourses have imagined 'working women' (of privileged segments of society) as acceptable or even approved 'Pakistani women', for example because women's political work was portrayed as making a contribution to the national development. This image was most prevalent in official state discourses during the 1940s independence movement, during the economic boom in the 1960s and during the late 1990s, when Pakistan ratified the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for example.<sup>14</sup> In other contexts, 'working women' have tended to be presented as imperfect 'Pakistani women', as for example when women working in mixed-gender, non-domestic work environments were portrayed as a danger to the nation. This image

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<sup>14</sup> Pakistan ratified CEDAW on 12 March 1996.

was very common during the Zia-ul-Haq's reign from 1977 to 1988 and has returned to prominence with the rise of fundamentalism after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. In yet other contexts, discourses have completely omitted to position 'working women' in relation to an ideal 'Pakistani woman', for example, because certain types of women's work, such as many agricultural activities, were simply never mentioned in state discourses. Such omissions have occurred throughout Pakistan's history due to the significant gap that still exists between the people within formal institutions who shape state discourses and those who do not.

The state of Pakistan has been implicated in structuring the workplace through its gendered labour policies and it has also been involved in the normative ordering of work through social ascriptions of gender identities. My review of the literature on Pakistan suggests that state discourses have often (and in diverse ways) drawn on 'Muslim-ness' to legitimate gendered orderings of work. In this respect, Pakistan seems to resemble other Muslim states that have elected to base their official discourses on religious elements as a means of contrasting their work arrangements with the 'Western' system (Afshar, 1997; Moghadam, 1992 & 1988; Ong, 1990; Yeganeh, 1993). For instance, Moghadam (1992) states that after the 1979 Iranian revolution and the subsequent Islamization policies, male and female roles were conceptualised as being distinctly different, with specific consequences for working women:

While women were not banned from the labour market, written permission by a male guardian was required. Women were barred from certain occupations and professions, such as judges, agriculture extension workers, mining engineers.

Women singers were not to be seen nor heard on radio and television. A law was

introduced limiting young mothers to part-time work only. Day care centres were closed down (Moghadam, 1992: 41-42).

However, the relation between the ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ and non-domestic work has been a contested issue throughout Pakistan’s history. Even though some conceptualisations of women and work have been more powerful than others and have been enshrined in state policies at specific historical junctures, alternative conceptualisations have always existed alongside them. This paper has sought to show the part played by the state in creating conflicting and opposing conceptualisations of women and work. This historical overview highlights images of an ideal ‘Pakistani woman’ that shape women’s subjectivities, i.e. “the experience of the lived multiplicity of positioning” (Blackman *et al.*, 2008: 6), in hegemonic ways.

This research has based its analysis on information about state discourses contained in the existing academic literature. Future research could use alternative analytical strategies to enhance our understanding of how Pakistani working women’s subjectivities have been shaped. One strategy might be to analyse state discourses using primary sources. Primary sources such as historical records of state leaders’ speeches and of labour union leaders might answer some of the questions not tackled in this study. Another strategy might be to analyse, either from primary or secondary, sources describing alternative locations in which images of ‘working women’ are constructed and subjectivities constituted. As I have argued above, state discourses offer only one perspective of how working women’s subjectivities are constituted. Taking power as a very disparate phenomenon, future research might therefore consider other analytical entry points such as everyday conversations and bodily gender and work practices in order to explore ways in which working women engage with and appropriate hegemonic discourses. Several authors

argue that the *social* implications of state discourses have been more powerful than the legal ones because discourses, for instance, have encouraged the public to act as enforcers of religious mores and thus to control (working) women (Cook, 2001: 35; Jafar, 2005: 40ff; Shaheed, 2010: 858ff; Weiss, 1994: 423). Scholars argue that handing over responsibility from the state to the general public has led to the murder of numerous women by non-state actors in the name of morality and that the culprits are never punished. Whatever analytical entry point is chosen, there is a need to look into how ‘working women’ are constructed and governed by discourses about gender and work, and the role of the Pakistani state in such processes.

### **Acknowledgements**

The research reported here was supported by the National Centre of Competence in Research North-South (NCCR North-South), with financial assistance from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and the participating institutions. I thank Sara Landolt, Urs Geiser, Ulrike Müller-Böker and Mathias Junginger for encouraging discussions and critical feedbacks on earlier drafts. I am grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their invaluable input.

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